

The Ancient Future: A Decolonial Odyssey of African Womanhood in Nnedi Okorafor's Comic Book *Shuri* (Vols. 1&2)

Alshaymaa Mohamed M. Ahmed

Assistant Professor, College of
Language and communication,
Arab Academy for Science,
Technology and Maritime
Transport (AASTMT), Egypt.

Abstract

Nnedi Okorafor's *Shuri* (2019) offers a compelling exploration of African womanhood, blending the frameworks of Africana Womanism and Afrofuturism to challenge traditional societal norms and stereotypes about African women. This paper argues that as an African superheroine, Shuri disrupts reductive narratives and envisions a decolonial future where African women reclaim agency, power, and identity. While Okorafor differentiates her term "Africanfuturism" from "Afrofuturism", this study acknowledges that the fictional Wakanda originated in the imagination of white American creators, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, and examines how Okorafor reinvents this world through an Africana lens. Shuri's narrative illustrates the

interconnected struggles of African women on the continent and in the diaspora, as both face systemic imperial, patriarchal, and racial oppression. By situating Africana Womanism within an Afrofuturistic framework, this paper highlights the transformative potential of speculative storytelling to subvert Eurocentric notions of African identity, womanhood, and futurity. Besides, the study underscores the importance of the imaginative resistance and the role of technology and cultural heritage in redefining African womanhood in a postcolonial context.

Keywords: Africana Womanism, Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism, Decolonisation, Comics, Shuri, Nnedi Okorafor

The Ancient Future: A Decolonial Odyssey of African Womanhood in Nnedi Okorafor's Comic Book *Shuri* (Vols. 1&2)

Alshaymaa Mohamed M. Ahmed

Introduction

The scholarly study of comic books has gained significant traction in recent years, with growing recognition of their value as cultural artifacts. These works intersect with education, activism, and heritage preservation, serving as platforms for storytelling and critical reflection. Within the African context, comic books hold particular significance, offering tools to reclaim marginalized narratives, challenge stereotypes, and promote cultural pride and intercultural understanding (Joseph et al., 2023; Keitumetse, 2016). Among these, Nnedi Okorafor's *Shuri* (2019) emerges as a transformative text in speculative fiction, redefining African womanhood by blending cultural heritage, technological mastery, and collaborative leadership. Through *Shuri*'s journey, Okorafor crafts a narrative that not only challenges colonial stereotypes but also envisions empowered and decolonial futures for African women.

Nnedi Okorafor, a prominent Nigerian-American writer, has established herself as a leading voice in speculative fiction, mainly through her contributions to Africanfuturism—a term she coined to describe stories rooted in African culture, realities, and perspectives. Her work spans novels, short stories, and graphic narratives, consistently showcasing her ability to weave African traditions and cosmologies into imaginative, futuristic narratives. Okorafor reclaims a character born within the Marvel Comics universe and infuses her with a distinctly African-centered

ethos. Known for her celebrated works like *Who Fears Death* (2010) and *Akata Witch* (2011), Okorafor's storytelling often disrupts Western-dominated narratives, replacing them with visions of African resilience, ingenuity, and cultural pride. *Shuri* exemplifies this ethos by portraying an African superheroine whose leadership and innovation redefine traditional archetypes and expand the possibilities of speculative fiction.

Shuri, conceived initially as a supporting character in Marvel's Black Panther universe, has been reimaged by Okorafor into a fully realized protagonist who transcends traditional superhero archetypes. Unlike many characters in speculative fiction, *Shuri* is not confined to a single role as a warrior or genius; she becomes a symbol of African ingenuity, resilience, and progress. Her story uniquely intertwines tradition and innovation, offering a nuanced portrayal of leadership that is deeply grounded in cultural pride while embracing the limitless possibilities of technological advancement.

Shuri predictively reconfigures the colonial and modern narrative to define a progressive future. *Shuri* makes her first appearance in the Marvel universe as Black Panther's assistant in *Black Panther* (Vol. 4) #2 (May 2005), written by Reginald Hudlin and illustrated by John Romita Jr. Nevertheless, despite her preexistence in the comics, *Shuri* is indebted to Ryan Coogler's cinematic interpretation of *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. *Black Panther* (Vol. 4) #2 (May 2005) by Reginald Hudlin and John Romita Jr. introduces *Shuri* as Black Panther's helper. Despite her comics

background, Shuri is heavily influenced by Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. Shuri has redefined black women within and outside of society.

She was Wakanda's princess and started appearing in various comic series, especially in *Black Panther*, from time to time. When she was loved, her solo adventures in Vol. 1 #1-5 (*Search for Black Panther*) started to be written by Nnedi Okorafor and illustrated by Leonardo Romero and Jordie Bellaire. Sometimes, the comic book series includes more than one writer or illustrator; in *Shuri*, only two issues, #6-7 of Vol. 2, are written by Vita Ayala, and the artists are Paul Davidson and Triona Farrell. For issues #8-10 of Vol.2 (*Vibranium* 24/7), the illustrators are Rachel Stott and Carlos Lopez, while Okorafor is the writer.

Shuri possesses a self-reliant personality and advanced technological abilities. The inclusion of acquired expertise in a female character holds great importance. She assumes leadership of Wakanda in her brother's absence. King T'Challa of Wakanda became stranded in outer space after being transported through a wormhole on Shuri's spacecraft. The story draws upon mythological elements by portraying Africa as the original and genuine wellspring of African diasporic identity. This is achieved through the emergence of a mystical nation called Wakanda, born out of an African continent struck by a meteorite composed of vibranium. As a result, the four tribes of Africa united and eventually became the nation of Wakanda.

This paper situates *Shuri* at the intersection of two critical frameworks: Africana Womanism and Afrofuturism. Africana Womanism, conceptualized by Clenora Hudson-Weems, emphasizes

self-definition, community well-being, and the reclamation of African women's roles as cultural custodians and leaders. It critiques Western feminism's tendency to marginalize race and cultural specificity, instead focusing on the lived experiences and collective struggles of African-descended women. Complementing this perspective, Afrofuturism, as defined by Mark Dery (1994) and expanded by Ytasha Womack (2013), reclaims Black narratives by placing African and diasporic identities at the center of speculative and technological futures. Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional lens to explore Shuri's character as a technocrat, cultural innovator, and decolonial leader.

The choice to focus on *Shuri* rather than other works in speculative fiction is deliberate. While Okorafor has crafted numerous narratives within the Africanfuturism space, Shuri's character offers a unique opportunity to bridge the diasporic and African-centered perspectives of Afrofuturism. Unlike Africanfuturism, which Okorafor defines as being rooted in African realities without the hybridized focus on the diaspora, Afrofuturism's transnational lens is more suitable for analyzing Wakanda—a fictional space that draws from both African traditions and diasporic imaginations. By positioning Shuri as a decolonial archetype within this framework, Okorafor reclaims a character born of American comic book traditions and imbues her with African-centered agency, redefining her role for global audiences.

This paper offers a distinctive contribution to scholarship by integrating Africana Womanism and Afrofuturism to examine Shuri's multidimensional narrative. While previous studies have explored these frameworks separately—

Africana Womanism's focus on reclaiming African women's agency (Hudson-Weems, 2004; Collins, 2002) and Afrofuturism's role in reimagining Black futures (Nama, 2009; Womack, 2013)—this research bridges these perspectives to reveal their combined potential in speculative fiction. Shuri's story demonstrates how these frameworks work together to reclaim African womanhood from colonial misrepresentations, redefine leadership, and inspire decolonial futures.

By analyzing the protagonist's technological innovations, collaborative leadership, and cultural reclamation, this study underscores the power of speculative fiction as a medium for addressing systemic inequities and amplifying African voices. Furthermore, this research invites broader discussions in speculative fiction and African cultural studies, illustrating how imaginative narratives can inspire not only individual empowerment but also collective liberation. Okorafor crafts a vision of African womanhood that is as culturally grounded as it is forward-looking, serving as a beacon for future storytelling and scholarship.

Africana Womanism and Afrofuturism

The intersection between Africana Womanism and Afrofuturism offers a profound and multifaceted framework for examining the experiences and agency of Black women within speculative and future-oriented narratives. Africana Womanism, a term coined by Clenora Hudson-Weems, provides an intellectual and cultural paradigm distinct from mainstream feminism by centering the experiences, struggles, and aspirations of women of African descent. It seeks to address Black women's historical and

cultural specificities that mainstream feminist movements have often neglected, emphasizing the significance of race, class, and gender as interwoven factors in their lived experiences (Hudson-Weems, 1993).

Africana Womanism is deeply rooted in African cultural traditions and highlights the collective and family-centered ethos fundamental to African communities' survival and progress. Unlike Western feminist movements, which primarily focus on gender-based struggles, Africana Womanism posits that race and culture are primary determinants of identity and experience for Black women. This perspective foregrounds the importance of self-naming and self-definition, advocating for a holistic approach that includes familial and communal responsibilities alongside individual empowerment (Davidson, 2010). Hudson-Weems outlines several core characteristics of Africana Womanism, such as self-naming, self-defining, family-centeredness, spiritual grounding, and male compatibility, which underscore the necessity of a united front against racial oppression (Hudson-Weems, 2006).

In contrast, Afrofuturism is a cultural and artistic movement that envisions futures in which Black identity is central to technological and cultural advancements. This movement transcends traditional Western narratives of progress by incorporating African traditions, mythology, and speculative thought to reimagine the possibilities for Black existence in the future. Afrofuturism encompasses various disciplines, including literature, music, film, and visual arts, offering alternative narratives that challenge the exclusionary nature of mainstream futurism (Dery, 1994). It seeks to address historical

injustices by presenting visions of Black empowerment deeply rooted in African heritage while engaging with futuristic and speculative elements. Afrofuturism, rather than Africanfuturism, is particularly significant as it provides a broader diasporic context, connecting the experiences of Black people across the world and offering a collective vision of liberation and empowerment that transcends continental boundaries (Phillips, 2006).

Afrofuturism's global reach allows for the construction of new identities that are not confined by geographic or cultural boundaries, positioning Black individuals within narratives of technological innovation and cultural resilience. It provides a necessary counter-narrative to dominant Western sci-fi imaginaries that have historically excluded or marginalized Black experiences (Norwood, 2013). Through speculative fiction, music, and visual arts, Afrofuturism challenges colonial legacies and envisions a future where Black communities are active agents in shaping their destinies.

The intersection of Africana Womanism and Afrofuturism creates a unique space for exploring Black women's agency in speculative futures. Both frameworks share a common goal of cultural reclamation and resistance to Western hegemonic narratives that have marginalized African identities (Norwood, 2013). Through the lens of Africana Womanism, Afrofuturism can be enriched by centering the roles of Black women not only as bearers of culture and tradition but also as architects of new worlds and possibilities. This intersectionality fosters a forward-looking vision of empowered Black womanhood deeply rooted in ancestral wisdom and community solidarity.

Moreover, integrating Africana Womanism within Afrofuturism allows a nuanced understanding of Black women's roles in shaping speculative futures. Works such as Octavia Butler's speculative fiction novels illustrate this convergence by portraying Black women as central figures navigating complex socio-political landscapes while maintaining their cultural and familial ties (Hubbard, 2012). Similarly, the works of Nnedi Okorafor offer narratives that blend traditional African knowledge with futuristic themes, presenting a vision where Black women harness their cultural legacies to navigate and shape technologically advanced futures. This framework will be applied to Nnedi Okorafor's comic book *Shuri*, which centers on the titular character from Marvel Comics, exploring themes of identity, technology, and cultural heritage within a futuristic context (Okorafor, 2019). *Shuri* embodies the intersection of Africana Womanist values and Afrofuturist visions, making her a compelling case study for analyzing how these frameworks interact in popular culture.

The comic book *Shuri* provides a unique narrative that embodies the familial and communal aspects emphasized in Africana Womanism while embracing Afrofuturism's speculative and visionary elements. *Shuri*'s character navigates the tensions between tradition and innovation, balancing her scientific prowess with cultural responsibilities. Through her journey, the narrative explores self-definition, resilience, and empowerment—core tenets of both Africana Womanism and Afrofuturism.

Afrofuturism encompasses the fusion of past, present, and future components. It seeks to not only recognize the unfavorable elements of the

past but also to employ stories about both the past and the present to regain control over the historical account of the future. A novel domain related to emerging industries increasingly shapes the discourse surrounding the future. Afrofuturism empowers individuals by imagining a future in which race no longer plays a role, hence eradicating the predetermined consequences associated with race. Assimilation, in contrast, supports a Eurocentric perspective as the prevailing worldview. The mainstream media depicts Afrodiasporic folks as either the sad progeny of enslaved people or "Africans who have endured the effects of colonisation... Nevertheless, Africa is consistently depicted as a "dystopian region" marked by enduring challenges such as drought, AIDS, and starvation" (Yaszek 3).

The intersectionality between Africana Womanism and Afrofuturism provides a rich and dynamic framework for understanding Black women's experiences and agency within speculative and futuristic contexts. By intertwining cultural heritage with visionary possibilities, this intersection offers a holistic and empowering perspective that challenges existing narratives and envisions new possibilities for Black womanhood. It affirms the centrality of race, class, and gender in shaping Black women's futures while celebrating their resilience, creativity, and community-centered ethos. So, the convergence of these frameworks provides a compelling vision of empowerment and cultural continuity that resonates across temporal and spatial dimensions.

In *Shuri*, these frameworks converge to illuminate the character's dual role as both a preserver of tradition and a pioneer of progress. Africana

Womanism provides the lens to examine her commitment to Wakandan cultural heritage, while Afrofuturism captures her technological innovations and visionary leadership. This intersection underscores how Shuri disrupts colonial narratives and redefines African womanhood. While Africana Womanism and Afrofuturism are distinct, this paper adopts Afrofuturism over Africanfuturism as its primary framework for several reasons. Nnedi Okorafor, the author of *Shuri*, defines Africanfuturism as "rooted in Africa, forward-looking, and optimistic" (2019). Unlike Afrofuturism, which encompasses diasporic experiences, Africanfuturism focuses exclusively on the African continent, rejecting hybridized narratives. Despite being based in the fictional African nation of Wakanda, the character of Shuri, was created by white American writers Stan Lee and Jack Kirby during the 1960s. Hence, there is a lack of enthusiasm for investigating the potentially troublesome elements of Africanfuturism rooted in the ideas of Anglo-American thinkers. Moreover, Shuri's African heritage is indisputable, and her story may encompass a broader range of experiences that go beyond the geographical limits of the continent. Therefore, Afrofuturism could be a reliable method for analysing *Shuri*.

Afrofuturism also is considered an expansion of the historical restoration initiatives that black Atlantic intellectuals have been involved in for over two centuries (Yaszek 247). Wakanda showcases Africans' technological skills and abilities to overcome challenges in *Shuri*. Africans were clever enough to analyse and destroy "slavery's dehumanization program" (Anderson & Jones .xvii). *Shuri* explores the role of gender and its impact on the place of

gender theorisation and new black womanhood in future discourse in Africa. Thus, Afrofuturism in *Shuri* speaks to much more than African diaspora interface but other political discourses, including postcolonial subjectivity and decolonization. By integrating Africana Womanism and Afrofuturism, this paper advances scholarship on speculative fiction and its potential to address historical erasures and envision decolonial futures.

Analysis and Discussion

Decolonizing African Womanhood

This analysis demonstrates how Shuri integrates Africana Womanism and Afrofuturism, positioning the protagonist as a transformative figure who reclaims African womanhood, disrupts colonial narratives, and reimagines empowered futures. Shuri's role as a self-definer, technocrat, and decolonial archetype challenges the most prevalent negative stereotype that African women were

“sexually depraved, licentious, wanton, immoral and loose” (hooks 165), which started in enslavement but persisted. This cliché justified white and black men's sexual assault of black women, who were perceived as available and eager. Nnedi Okorafor's future Shuri, a powerful, clever, and autonomous superheroine, defies these preconceptions. Her ancestors call Shuri the “ancient future” (Okorafor, 2019, Vol.1#1&2) because her role exemplifies a cultural syncretism in which the ancient and the future coexist harmonically rather than in conflict. This combination results in a distinct storyline where African cultural values propel futuristic progress, demonstrating how the past and future may combine to provide a more elaborate and dynamic perspective of what might be achieved. Shuri, as the “ancient future”, illustrates a synthesis of traditional African culture and futuristic innovation, demonstrating how the wisdom of the past can inform and enhance the possibilities of the new future for African womanhood.

Figure (1) Representation of *Shuri*, Issue #1



Shuri's journey powerfully embodies the Africana Womanist principle of self-definition, as described by Clenora Hudson-Weems (2004). Africana Womanism insists that African women must reclaim the authority to define their identities, rejecting roles imposed by colonial or patriarchal systems. Shuri exemplifies this principle when she declines the Wakandan council's insistence that she assume the mantle of the Black Panther. In *Shuri* Vol. 1: *The Search for Black Panther*, she boldly declares, "I've been the Panther before, and... it wasn't a good fit. I died trying to live up to that legacy. Let this tradition end and begin a new one" (Okorafor, 2019b, Vol. 1 #2). This moment is transformative, as Shuri refuses to be confined by tradition or expectations, instead advocating for a new vision of leadership based on collective strength rather than individual heroism.

Shuri's decision to step away from the legacy of the Black Panther redefines what it means to lead in Wakanda. Rather than following a rigid, hierarchical tradition, she envisions leadership as a shared responsibility. This aligns closely with Hudson-Weems' emphasis on agency, where African women resist being shaped by external forces and instead actively determine their paths. By breaking away from the Black Panther archetype, Shuri shifts Wakandan leadership from a focus on singular power to one that is distributed and inclusive, emphasizing the collective contributions of her community. This approach challenges patriarchal frameworks of leadership, where power is often concentrated in individuals, and instead mirrors Africana Womanism's commitment to communal well-being and shared progress.

The collaborative nature of Shuri's leadership is further illustrated in her consultation with the council of Wakandan women elders under the Baobab tree. The Baobab tree, often called the "tree of life" in African traditions, symbolizes resilience, wisdom, and continuity. This setting visually underscores the rootedness of her leadership in Wakanda's cultural and historical fabric. Her respect for ancestral knowledge and willingness to engage in collective decision-making demonstrate a rejection of the top-down leadership model typically glorified in Western narratives. Instead, she embodies a style of governance deeply connected to indigenous practices, echoing Achille Mbembe's (2017) argument that decolonization requires reclaiming traditional spaces of knowledge and grounding leadership in indigenous epistemologies.

Shuri's actions also echoes bell hooks' (1990) critique of colonial portrayals of African women as either submissive or confrontational. In rejecting the binary of unquestioning compliance or outright rebellion, Shuri presents a nuanced model of African womanhood that values collaboration and introspection. She does not position herself as a solitary figure of resistance but as a part of a larger collective striving for progress. Her rejection of the Black Panther mantle is not a rejection of responsibility but rather a reimagining of leadership, where the focus shifts from fulfilling external expectations to serving the broader needs of her community. This model directly challenges colonial stereotypes that have long misrepresented African women's roles, offering instead a vision of leadership that is dynamic, inclusive, and transformative.

Shuri's leadership also highlights the interplay between tradition and innovation, a hallmark of both African Womanism and Afrofuturism. While deeply rooted in Wakandan traditions, as seen in her engagement with the council of elders, she also advocates for forward-thinking approaches to governance. Her emphasis on creating a new legacy reflects her understanding that cultural continuity does not mean stagnation. Instead, it involves adapting traditions to meet the community's evolving needs. This perspective aligns with Afrofuturism's emphasis on imagining futures where African identities and histories are central to progress, as Ytasha Womack (2013) suggests. By blending traditional wisdom with her innovative vision, Shuri demonstrates that leadership can honor the past while boldly shaping the future.

Through her journey of self-definition, Shuri reclaims African womanhood in ways that challenge and subvert colonial narratives. Her refusal to conform to the expectations of tradition and her embrace of a collaborative, community-centred leadership model presents a powerful counter-narrative to the archetypes imposed on African women. She is neither the submissive figure nor the overly confrontational one; instead, she is a leader who listens, adapts, and innovates. By grounding her leadership in cultural heritage and forward-thinking ideals, Shuri offers a reimagined vision of African identity that is empowering and deeply rooted in resilience. This nuanced portrayal not only enriches her character, but also provides a compelling framework for understanding African womanhood in speculative fiction.

Her role as Wakanda's leading technocrat highlights her ability to

integrate advanced technology with cultural preservation, embodying the principles of Afrofuturism. In her capacity as a scientist and innovator, she exemplifies the vision of Afrofuturism, which, as Kodwo Eshun (2003) and Ytasha Womack (2013) explain, reclaims African ingenuity and positions it at the center of speculative futures. Unlike colonial narratives depicting Africa as stagnant or dependent on external influences, Shuri's technological advancements present a bold vision of self-reliance and creativity, reinforcing the idea that African progress is deeply rooted in its histories and traditions.

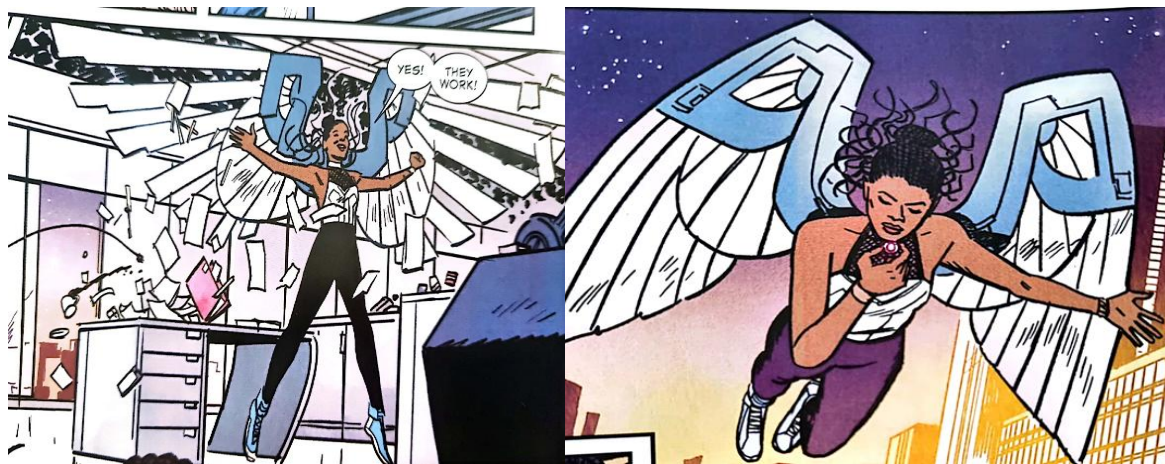
One of Shuri's most notable innovations is the advanced AI system, a technological marvel that serves as both a digital archive and a spiritual guide. This dual functionality encapsulates Afrofuturism's ethos of blending modern science with ancestral wisdom. The AI system provides Shuri with critical insights during a national crisis, declaring: "I hold the stories of our ancestors, but I am not just a machine. I am the keeper of Wakanda's soul" (Okorafor, 2019b, Vol. 1 #4). This interaction illustrates how technology in Wakanda is not merely a tool for problem-solving but a repository of cultural identity and spiritual continuity. The AI's design, infused with African motifs and patterns, further emphasizes its role as a bridge between Wakanda's technological advancements and its cultural heritage. Shuri redefines what it means to innovate within an African context by combining cutting-edge artificial intelligence with oral storytelling traditions.

Beyond her work with the AI, Shuri's creation of nanotech wings is another example of her inventive genius. Flight, a recurring theme in African folklore and mythology, often symbolizes

freedom, transcendence, and unbounded potential. Shuri explains the significance of her invention: “These wings remind me that there are no limits—not to science, not to our future” (Okorafor, 2019b, Vol. 1 #3). Okorafor again merges traditional symbols of liberation with futuristic possibilities by reimagining the concept of flight through nanotechnology, reinforcing Afrofuturism’s commitment to connecting the past with the future. The

image of Shuri soaring above Wakanda not only challenges colonial depictions of Africa as technologically primitive but also asserts the continent’s capacity for groundbreaking innovation and unshackled progress. As Nama (2009) observes, such representations disrupt the Eurocentric gaze, presenting African agency and creativity as central to global advancement.

Figure (2) Shuri’s wings, Issue #3



In addition to her technological achievements, Shuri’s innovations often address Wakanda’s collective needs, reflecting her community-oriented ethos. For example, her upgrades to Wakanda’s vibranium technology are not developed for personal acclaim but to ensure the nation’s security and prosperity. This approach aligns with Africana Womanism’s emphasis on collective empowerment and shared responsibility. By applying her scientific expertise to enhance Wakanda’s defenses, transportation systems, and communications, Shuri reinforces her role as a technocrat whose work is deeply intertwined with her commitment to the well-being of her people. The portrayal of vibranium, Wakanda’s unique resource,

reinforces this integration. Vibranium transforms Wakanda into a space where terrestrial and cosmic elements coexist, symbolizing the potential of African ingenuity to transcend conventional boundaries. It is a practical tool for technological advancement and a metaphor for African resilience and creativity. This imaginative use of vibranium disrupts colonial narratives that have historically positioned Africa as a site of extraction and dependency (Strong & Chaplin, 2019). Instead, Wakanda’s self-sufficiency and its use of vibranium to enrich its environment and culture emphasize African agency and innovation. Shuri states: “My work is not just about building the future; it is about making sure that our past and our culture

are honoured in every step forward” (Okorafor, 2019c, Vol.2 #2). This illustrates how Shuri’s technological innovations are deeply intertwined with her cultural identity, merging Afrofuturist ideals with personal empowerment.

Shuri’s contributions also challenge the traditional dichotomy between science and spirituality, a hallmark of Western epistemology. Her inventions often draw from both realms, demonstrating that technological progress need not come at the expense of cultural or spiritual values. For instance, her use of vibranium—a material deeply connected to Wakandan lore and mythology—reflects her ability to integrate natural resources with advanced technology. This synthesis underscores Afrofuturism’s vision of progress that is both forward-looking and deeply rooted in African identity. Womack (2013) notes that Afrofuturism disrupts the Western binary of tradition versus modernity, instead envisioning futures where cultural heritage and technological innovation coexist harmoniously. The aesthetic elements of Shuri’s technological creations further amplify their significance. Her lab, filled with Wakandan textiles, sculptures, and

artifacts, reflects her respect for tradition even as she pushes the boundaries of scientific exploration. Holograms dominate the space, allowing Shuri to manipulate complex simulations, designs, and research data with simple gestures. These 3D projections often depict blueprints, molecular structures, or combat scenarios. Similarly, the intricate design of the AI system transforms it from a mere machine into a cultural artifact, imbued with meaning and history. These details challenge Eurocentric depictions of scientific spaces, presenting a uniquely African vision of technological progress. Shuri exemplifies how Afrofuturism reclaims African ingenuity and positions it at the forefront of global progress through her work as a technocrat and innovator. Her creations, from the AI to her nanotech wings, are not just tools but symbols of a future where African identity and technology are inseparable. By integrating science with spirituality, tradition with innovation, and individual brilliance with communal goals, Shuri redefines what it means to lead and create in a decolonial context. Her story is a testament to the power of imagination in envisioning empowered futures, firmly rooted in African knowledge systems and cultural pride.

Figure (3) Shuri’s Lab, Issue #4



Shuri's story is a powerful reclamation of African womanhood, challenging colonial stereotypes while presenting a multifaceted and empowering identity. As Patricia Hill Collins (2002) explains, *Africana Womanism* addresses Black women's unique struggles, especially how intersecting oppressions have historically limited their roles. Shuri disrupts these narratives by embodying a dynamic character—a scientist, a warrior, and a cultural leader—who integrates intellectual brilliance with a deep commitment to Wakandan heritage. Her actions and choices reflect the resilience and adaptability that Clenora Hudson-Weems (2004) emphasizes as central to the survival and strength of African women.

Shuri's collaborative approach to governance sets her apart from many traditional portrayals of leaders. In Vol. 2, she works alongside the elders of Wakanda to address challenges, showing that her leadership is not about individual power but collective strength. This focus on community echoes Hudson-Weems' vision of leadership rooted in collective well-being and shared responsibility. Shuri balances her roles—protector, scientist, and cultural ambassador—while dismantling colonial depictions of African women as passive or secondary. Instead, she redefines leadership by combining innovation, collaboration, and cultural pride.

Visually, Shuri's representation reinforces her role as a symbol of African identity and heritage. Her vibrant costumes are adorned with traditional Wakandan patterns and symbols celebrating African artistry. Her hairstyles, from intricate braids to natural Afros, challenge Eurocentric beauty standards and proudly affirm Black

cultural aesthetics. These choices align with Afrofuturism, which, as Ytasha Womack (2013) describes, reclaims Black cultural aesthetics and places them in imaginative and empowering contexts. Similarly, her garments, which merge African textiles with functional superhero designs, celebrate African aesthetics and cultural identity. These choices underline the multidimensionality of Shuri's character, aligning with *Africana Womanism's* emphasis on self-definition and cultural pride (Hudson-Weems 2004). Through Shuri's appearance, Okorafor affirms that Black women's bodies and identities are sites of empowerment rather than oppression, subverting stereotypes that have historically dehumanized African women.

Shuri's lab is another striking example of how she blends cultural heritage with technological innovation. Unlike the cold, impersonal labs often seen in Western narratives, Shuri's workspace is filled with Wakandan textiles, sculptures, and artifacts, creating a space where tradition and progress coexist. This design challenges the notion that technological advancement requires abandoning cultural identity. Instead, it reflects the Afrofuturist vision of using technology to amplify cultural roots, not erase them. Shuri's ability to innovate while staying grounded in her heritage showcases how African knowledge systems can inform modern science and technology. The laboratory, a focal point of Wakanda's technological innovation, exemplifies the seamless integration of African culture and cutting-edge science. Adorned with African art, textiles, and artifacts, the lab visually asserts the inseparability of tradition and innovation in Wakandan society. Shuri's attire further emphasises this synthesis by combining a traditional African outfit with a white lab

coat. This juxtaposition rejects the binary opposition between modernity and tradition and positions Wakandan advancements as deeply rooted in cultural heritage (Womack 2013). Through this portrayal, Okorafor challenges the Western tendency to view science as divorced from spirituality, instead presenting a holistic perspective where cultural identity fuels technological progress.

Her role as a mentor further highlights her commitment to legacy and cultural continuity. In *Shuri* Vol. 2, she teaches Wakandan children about vibranium and its role in their society, blending science with cultural storytelling. This mentorship mirrors the AI tradition of West Africa, where storytellers pass down knowledge and history to future generations. By teaching the next generation, Shuri embodies the Africana Womanist focus on intergenerational solidarity and the preservation of cultural understanding. Her actions ensure that Wakanda's future remains deeply connected to its past.

Shuri's narrative also challenges the colonial stereotypes that have long misrepresented African women. Her independence, intelligence, and resourcefulness stand in direct opposition to the historical portrayals of African women as oppressed or primitive. Ahmed (2022) points out how colonial frameworks often dehumanized African women, branding them as "barbaric" or "uncivilized" (129). Shuri flips this narrative, portraying African womanhood that is empowered, dignified, and central to her community's success. Her character is a testament to the strength and resilience of African women and a direct challenge to the harmful legacies of colonialism.

Okorafor's comic book redefines African womanhood by blending cultural heritage with a forward-looking vision of innovation and empowerment. She represents the intersection of Africana Womanism and Afrofuturism, showing how the two frameworks work together to honor the past while imagining new futures. Through her leadership, mentorship, and representation, Shuri transcends stereotypes and offers a new model for how African women can be portrayed in speculative fiction. Her narrative is not just a reclamation of African identity—it's a celebration of its enduring strength and transformative potential.

Okorafor powerfully interweaves Western technology as the primary frame for her comic book to interweave Western culture into indigenous people's cultures. Thus, *Shuri* allows Okorafor to create her combat literature, in which indigenous writers incite African "people to fight for their existence as a nation" (Fanon 240). Therefore, *Shuri* is a powerful decolonial prototype by reclaiming African narratives from colonial frameworks and re-establishing Africa as a central site of intellectual and technological leadership. Frantz Fanon (1968) argues that decolonization requires the reclamation of space, narrative, and agency, dismantling colonial hierarchies and asserting the sovereignty of marginalized cultures. Shuri's actions exemplify this reclamation, particularly in the way she positions Wakanda as a global leader in innovation while deeply rooted in African traditions. A striking example of this occurs at the end of Vol. 1, where she holds a press conference in Timbuktu, a city historically renowned for its libraries and intellectual heritage. Declaring, "We share Wakanda's wisdom here, in a place that has always been a beacon of

knowledge for Africa and the world” (Okorafor, 2019b, Vol. 1 #5), Shuri symbolically connects Wakanda’s technological advancements to Timbuktu’s historical role as a center of learning and culture. This act challenges colonial narratives that have historically dismissed Africa’s intellectual contributions, reframing Africa as a global intellectual leader.

This symbolic act resonates with Achille Mbembe’s (2017) concept of Afropolitanism, which emphasizes Africa’s historical and cultural contributions to global modernity. Afropolitanism positions African identity as inherently transnational and interconnected, rejecting the reduction of Africa to a monolithic or isolated entity. By situating Wakanda’s innovations within the legacy of Timbuktu, Shuri enacts Afropolitanism, demonstrating how African heritage and global engagement can coexist dynamically. This act not only restores pride in Africa’s historical contributions but also disrupts Western frameworks that marginalize African epistemologies. As framed through Afropolitanism, Shuri’s actions exemplify how decolonial narratives can

reposition Africa as a foundational site of global knowledge and creativity, not merely a recipient of Western modernity.

Shuri’s meditation under the Baobab tree further illustrates her decolonial ethos, blending spiritual practices with technological innovation in ways that challenge the binaries of tradition versus progress often imposed by Western modernity. Reflecting, “The ancestors guide me through the stars and the soil. They are the bridge between what we were and what we can be” (Okorafor, 2019b, Vol. 1 #4), Shuri draws upon ancestral wisdom as a source of guidance in her scientific problem-solving. The Baobab tree, a potent symbol in African cosmology representing life, wisdom, and continuity, is a physical and metaphorical space where Shuri integrates African spiritual practices with modern technological pursuits. This synthesis challenges colonial frameworks, often portraying African spirituality as incompatible with modernity. Womack (2013) articulates that Afrofuturism rejects such binaries, envisioning futures where African traditions and epistemologies coexist harmoniously with technological progress.

Figure (4) Baobab Tree, Issue #2



The technological innovations exemplifies Afrofuturism's commitment to honoring African traditions while projecting them into speculative futures. As Kodwo Eshun (2003) explains, Afrofuturism seeks to "reconfigure history" (p. 288), positioning Africa not as a passive subject of colonial narratives but as an active agent in shaping global futures. Therefore, Shuri critiques and transcends Western knowledge systems that prioritize material progress while dismissing the value of spirituality and communal knowledge. Shuri's integration of ancestral wisdom into her technological innovations directly challenges these stereotypes, offering an alternative paradigm where African epistemologies are central to global progress. Her approach supports bell hooks' (1990) call to reclaim the "margin as a site of resistance," transforming spaces traditionally viewed as peripheral into sites of agency and empowerment. By rooting her innovations in Wakandan traditions, Shuri demonstrates that African ways of knowing are not relics of the past but essential elements of modernity and the future.

Besides, Wakanda's narrative could be a blueprint for decolonial futures, where African identity and agency are integral to global narratives. By framing Wakanda as an intellectual and technological leader, she reclaims the power of African cultural heritage, transforming it from a static artifact to a living force that shapes the future. This reclamation aligns with Fanon's assertion that decolonization must restore dignity and pride to the colonized, empowering them to redefine their place in the world. Shuri's blending of spiritual and scientific knowledge provides a counter-narrative to Western modernity's exclusionary frameworks, offering a vision of progress

that is both culturally grounded and globally impactful. Her character exemplifies the transformative potential of decolonial storytelling, creating spaces for African voices to redefine their pasts and envision futures that are both imaginative and liberatory.

Moreover, Shuri's significance as a multifaceted figure in speculative fiction becomes even more evident when she is considered alongside other Black female characters. While characters like Storm from *X-Men* (first appearance in 1975) and Michonne from *The Walking Dead* (introduced in 2005) reflect certain dimensions of strength and leadership, their narratives often focus on narrower depictions of Black womanhood. Storm's identity as a mutant leader and her elemental powers highlight themes of control and authority, yet her character rarely explores intellectual or technological contributions. Similarly, Michonne's survivalist resilience in a dystopian world emphasizes adaptability and emotional strength but lacks the cultural and innovative scope that defines Shuri's role in *Shuri* (Okorafor, 2019b). In comparison to Storm's largely individualistic narratives and Michonne's struggle for personal survival, Shuri's character thrives on communal empowerment. Her willingness to share knowledge and cultivate collective resilience resonates deeply with Africana Womanism's focus on solidarity and cultural continuity. This emphasis on intergenerational wisdom and responsibility also reflects Afrofuturism's forward-looking vision, where futures are built on the foundation of African traditions. As Womack (2013) argues, Afrofuturism imagines futures where Black identity thrives not despite the past but because of it. Unlike Storm, whose visual identity often leans into Western

superhero aesthetics, or Michonne, whose appearance reflects a dystopian ruggedness, Shuri's design celebrates the vibrancy of African culture. Her various hairstyles, including intricate braids and natural Afro styles, challenge Eurocentric beauty standards while affirming the diversity and creativity of Black womanhood. These visual elements align with Afrofuturism's reclamation of Black aesthetics, positioning Shuri as a figure who redefines the narrative of African representation in popular culture.

Shuri's ability to seamlessly integrate leadership, cultural heritage, and technological innovation sets her apart. Her position as Wakanda's sole renowned scientist is also an example of "unusual kinds of females that do not fit into the categories that Euro-American racial or patriarchal hierarchies ascribed to African women" (Hoydis 74). However, beyond her technological innovations, her actions consistently emphasise community-oriented leadership. A particularly illustrative example is her involvement in guiding Wakanda's younger generation. In *Shuri* Vol. 2 (2019c), her mentorship of children and her role in educating them about Wakanda's technological advancements underscore her dedication to fostering the next generation of African innovators. This act reflects Africana Womanism's principles of family-centeredness and collective progress, as articulated by Hudson-Weems (2004).

The narrative also extends beyond the confines of Wakanda to address universal themes of Black resilience and empowerment. For example, her interactions with the Dora Milaje, Wakanda's elite female warriors, demonstrate the collective strength of African women working toward shared goals. The Dora Milaje, embodying a blend of cultural pride and martial

excellence, reflect the interconnectedness of Shuri's intellectual leadership and the broader collective power of Wakandan women. This communal dynamic contrasts with more individualistic portrayals of strength in characters like Storm and Michonne, emphasizing the synergy between individual agency and collective progress.

By weaving these elements together, Wakanda's princess emerges as a transformative figure who reclaims African narratives and reimagines Black futures. Her character embodies the intersection of Africana Womanism and Afrofuturism, integrating principles of cultural heritage, community empowerment, and innovative progress. This analysis situates her as a speculative fiction model that challenges colonial stereotypes and expands the scope of representation for Black women. *Shuri* provides a powerful template for how speculative fiction can engage with themes of identity, resistance, and empowerment on both African and global stages through her leadership, innovation, and connection to tradition. Okorafor's blending of science and spirituality further challenges Western frameworks that separate tradition from progress. Shuri's meditation under the Baobab tree, where she seeks guidance from her ancestors, exemplifies this synthesis. This cyclical understanding of time, where the past informs the present and future, aligns with Afrofuturism's rejection of linear temporalities (Eshun 2003). By incorporating ancestral wisdom into her scientific work, Shuri embodies a uniquely African approach to progress that honors heritage while envisioning a dynamic future.

Through her portrayal of Shuri, Okorafor crafts what Frantz Fanon (1968) describes as "combat literature," using

storytelling to resist colonial frameworks and reclaim African narratives. Shuri's cultural pride position her as a decolonial model who asserts African agency and identity globally. This narrative actively counters Western discourses of domination and presents an alternative vision of African womanhood rooted in self-definition, resilience, and creativity. By integrating African traditions with futuristic innovation, Okorafor demonstrates the power of speculative fiction to reimagine African futures and challenge deeply ingrained stereotypes.

Conclusion

This paper explores how Nnedi Okorafor's *Shuri* combines African womanism and Afrofuturism to redefine African womanhood, challenge colonial narratives, and imagine decolonial futures. By analyzing Shuri's character and her role in Wakanda, this study shows how Okorafor combines cultural heritage with technological innovation, creating a resilient, inventive, and strong leader protagonist. The figure of Shuri in *Black*

Panther is a strong case of imaginative resistance because she defies colonial narratives and reclaims African identity through technological integration and cultural heritage. Her ingenuity and technological knowledge highlight the agency of African futurism in envisioning new futures beyond the boundaries constructed by colonial inheritances. Through juxtaposing Wakandan heritage and scientific advances in a symbiotic manner, Shuri redefines African womanhood while deconstructing Western-imposed stereotypes; she situates African women as agents of change and innovators. In the postcolonial sphere, her presence establishes the resilience of indigenous knowledge systems, proving that cultural heritage and technological advancement are not mutually exclusive but can be blended to create an engaged, independent future. In summary, Shuri's story is a testament to the core power of imaginative resistance in asserting control and constructing new, empowering identities for African women in the age of globalization.

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Alshaymaa M. *Comparative Postcolonialism in the Works of V.S. Naipaul and Toni Morrison: Fragmented Identities*. Lexington Books, Lanham: Maryland, 2022.
- Anderson, R., & Jones, C.E. eds. *Afrofuturism: The Rise of Astro-Blackness*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017.
- Collins, P. H. *Black Feminist Thought*. London, England: Routledge, 2002.
- Davidson, J. R. *African American Studies*. Edinburgh University Press, 2010.
- Dery, M. "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose", In *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, pp.179–233, 1994.
- Eshun, K. "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism". *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 3(2), pp. 287–302, 2003.
- Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press, 1968.
- hooks, bell. *Ain't I A Woman: Black women and Feminism*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1990.
- Hoydis, J. "Fantastically Hybrid: Race, Gender, and Genre in Black Female Speculative Fiction", *Anglistik: International Journal of English Studies*, no 26.2, September pp. 71–88., 2015
- Hubbard, L. 'Frances Ellen Watkins Harper: A Proto-Africana Womanist'. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 36(1), 68-75, 2012.
- Hudson-Weems. *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, New Edition, London: Routledge, 1993
- Hudson-Weems . "Africana Womanism" in L. Phillips (Ed.). *The Womanist Reader*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group pp. 44-54, 2006
- Hudson-Weems, C. *Africana Womanist Literary Theory*. New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Joseph, F., Esseku., Victor, Teye., & Majd, Musa. "The Role of Animation in Preserving Ghanaian Cultural Heritage" in *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, doi: 10.47772/ijriss.2023.7663, 2023.
- Keitumetse, O., Susan. *African Cultural Heritage Conservation and Management: Theory and Practice from Southern Africa*. University of Botswana Maun, Botswana: Springer, 2016
- Nama, A. "Brave Black Worlds: Black Superheroes as Science Fiction Cyphers" in *African Identities* 7(2): pp.133–144, 2009

- Norwood, C. 'Perspectives in Africana Feminism: Exploring Expressions of Black Feminism/Womanism in the African Diaspora'. *Sociology Compass*, 7(3), 225-236, 2013.
- Okorafor, Nnedi . "Africanfuturism Defined." Nnedi's Wahala Zone Blog. 2019a , Available at <http://nnedi.blogspot.com/>, 2019a
- Okorafor, Nnedi . Ayala, V., Davidson, P., Fagan, K., & Stott, R. Shuri Vol. 2: 24/7 *Vibranium*. Marvel Worldwide, Inc., A Subsidiary of Marvel Entertainment, LLC, 2019c
- Okorafor, Nnedi. "Mother of Invention." *Slate*, 2018 Available at <https://slate.com/technology/2018/02/mother-of-invention-a-new-short-story-by-nnediokorafor.html>.
- Okorafor, Nnedi. "Sci-fi Stories that Imagine a Future Africa.", 2017, Available at <https://bit.ly/3jxt01Z>.
- Okorafor, Nnedi. Romeo, Leonardo and Bellaire, Jordie. Shuri Vol.1: *The Search For Black Panther*. Marvel Worldwide, INC: New York, 2019 b
- Phillips, L. *The Womanist Reader*. Routledge, 2006.
- Strong, Myron T. & Chaplin, K. Sean. "Afrofuturism and Black Panther", *Contexts* 18:2. 2019, Available at <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1536504219854725>.
- Womack, Y. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-fi and Fantasy Culture*. Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books, 2013.
- Yaszek, L. "Afrofuturism, science fiction and the history of the future". In *Socialism and Democracy* 20 (3). 41-60, 2006, DOI: B10.1080/08854300600950236.